

HABEAS CORPUS

by Alan Bennett

24th - 26th April 2008

Alan Bennett's 1973 cheeky farce of sexual frustration and rather risqué confusion, took place in the swinging 60's, and was an observational triumph with all lines relevant and no opportunity wasted. The title Habeas Corpus is not quite the usual recognisable legal term, but more a literal translation 'you have the body' which took on an all too physical meaning.

The swinging sixties were really quite tame compared with what is now permitted both on and off the stage, and Alan Bennett's play may have been quite an expression of the 'permissive society' of that time and the content might have been in vogue then, but the dialogue is occasionally somewhat dated and irrelevant today. However the play was thoroughly enjoyable and any dated references were overlooked due to the excellent production and performance.

Outstanding were the mischievous Mrs Swabb (possibly related to Mrs Mop?) who seemed ever present to delightfully explain, guide and comment on the proceedings, and to arrange the sparse set of just three chairs in various combinations to keep the play moving without curtain interruptions.

The ageing Dr Wicksteed cannot quite let go of his youth, is bored by his marriage, doesn't understand his pimply, hypochondriac son and lusts after the glamorous Felicity.

The naive and virgin Cannon Throbbing has been engaged for 10 years to the doctor's flat-chested sister Constance who dreams of large breasts and orders some in a box, not expecting a man to come and fit them. The Doctor's wife who is naturally amply endowed, willingly entertains the young fitter with hilarious consequences. The additional characters of the suicidal Mr Purdue, Sir Percy Shorter and Lady Rumpers added their amusing recollections of war-time goings-on with almost inevitable results.

Congratulations to the production team and the whole of the cast who were extremely well-chosen, well-rehearsed and almost faultless in their performance.

It is good to know that the Beaufort Players continue to attract such a fine membership from which they can select sufficient and amply proficient players to stage an Alan Bennett farce to such a high standard. The play might have been a little risqué in 1973, but is quite acceptable today for staging in a church hall !

John Hummerston